

... May the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart be pleasing and of you, who are ROCK, REDEEMER, and COMFORTER of us all. Amen.

Beguiled by Beauty: Cultivating a Life of Contemplation and Compassion is the name of this worship series. For the next few weeks, we will hear about the idea of living a more contemplative life and how that life will draw us closer to God and equip us to love and serve others. Last week we were invited to soak in deep springs...to water our roots. Along with the weekly images of beauty, chimes and lighted candles, Donna shared the image of a tree or house plant. In this, as we nurture the plant with water, we were invited to drink water ourselves and take in nourishment from contemplating on the beauty around us, growing from seeds to trees, and providing shelter and protection for those in our lives.

Today, our time will be spent in deepening our awareness that we are made for the Beloved...that we are deeply loved... that we matter and are full of goodness though we may be forgetful in remembering how much we are loved.

So I want to share with you today three contemplative practices that are helpful to me when it is hard to remember how deeply God loves each of us and all of creation. One we've already spoken of...wrapping in the warmth of God's love with a blanket or comforter. Basking in Sunshine is another way I draw close to God and remembering God's love... see Ivy Rose... she is a sun-basking pup! Holly Bear, too, enjoys just turning her face to the sun, especially on the cool, crisp days of Fall. Zachary, however, is much more the burrow in a blanket pup. And of course, snuggling is best of all.

The third contemplative practice involves looking about to notice a small thing. That's how I located Ellsworthy, the worn Lamb, by paying attention and looking at the ground as I walked. Here's what I found last week as I took a walk. It is a nut of some sort... but I was drawn to its special characteristics, its stem, and the hole in its side.

As I gazed at the nut I found, I was reminded of Julian of Norwich, a contemplative of the 15th century. Julian lived in Norwich, England. She lived in a time that was full of suffering...much like today. (Black Plague, Inquisition,

Hundred Years War, famine, Peasant Revolt) Much of her life was spent living alone in a room connected to the church. She prayed and saw visions from God, and offered wisdom to those who came to speak with her. Her experiences are recorded in a book, *Revelations of Divine Love*.

Here is what she said about a hazel nut:

And in this he showed me a little thing, the quantity of a hazel nut, lying in the palm of my hand, as it seemed. And it was as round as any ball. I looked upon it with the eye of my understanding, and thought, 'What may this be?' And it was answered generally thus, 'It is all that is made.' I marveled how it might last, for I thought it might suddenly have fallen to nothing for littleness. And I was answered in my understanding: It lasts and ever shall, for God loves it. And so have all things their beginning by the love of God.

In this little thing I saw three properties. The first is that God made it. The second that God loves it. And the third, that God keeps it."

— Julian of Norwich, [Revelations of Divine Love](#)

I don't know what kind of nut I found, but I think the same thinking applies:

God made it. God loves it. God keeps it.

If this is so, friends, what does this say about God and humanity... about God and each of us? How does this inform our lives as we love and serve God's people?

One of the deep challenges I have had in the last seven months is the state of our world and our country as we struggle with managing a virus and pandemic, manage the news and information made available, and how divisive rhetoric has become as we wrestle with racial injustice and an election season. Researchers and scientists note that humanity has a negativity bias... we tend to focus on negative encounters and interactions. There is sense in this... evolution leads to this... it keeps us safe, helps to protect us, and is especially true in times of pandemic, famines, floods, war, and corruption. Our negativity bias can keep us safe, but it can also make us feel miserable! It can be one of the things that impede our relationship to God and to one another. Dr Wendy Farley, Professor

of Spirituality writes that we also have a "natural tendency toward the good—both ordinary good things and also the ultimate Good—the Beloved, God." Practicing a contemplative lifestyle helps with keeping the negative bias in check.

Contemplation invites us to rest in comfort and joy that we are beloved children of God. The psalmist reminds us that one of the practices that lead us toward Goodness is the practice of worship. Even in the midst of real suffering, we praise God; we remember the One who holds us, stays with us, and fills us with joy. It is in the security of this place, in the arms of the Beloved, that we can find the strength to see the negativity and say, 'No, no, not today! Today I remember I am Loved...I am a child of God...I am blessed ... I am not alone.'

As the psalmist states, 'You will show me the path of life...and guide me to joy forever.'

By remembering that Divine Goodness is love and loves us, we remember who we ourselves are: lovers of the Beloved, in love with the Holy One's much cherished creation. This metanoia (spiritual shift) is the heart of the contemplative way.

The contemplative way of life is not simply adding on meditation or prayer practices to our beliefs about God. It is a wild journey which unravels our beliefs about God in order to drop into deeper relationship with the Divine Beloved.

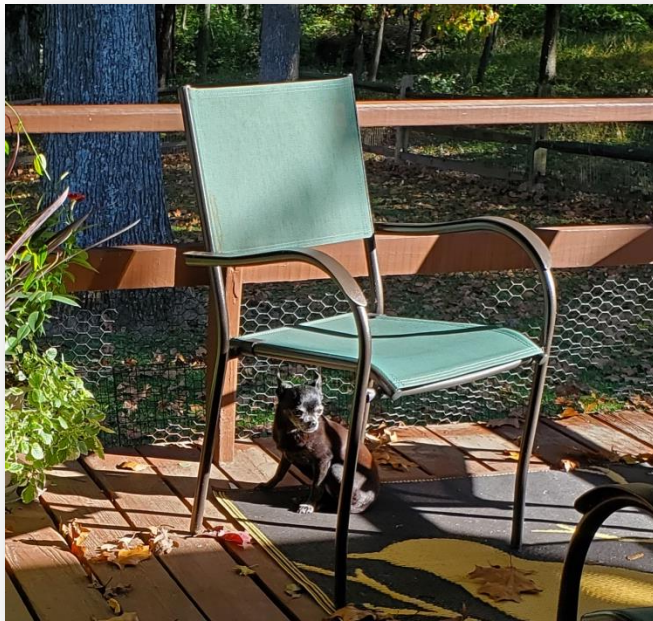
Who we understand God to be is deeply related to who we believe ourselves to be. If I am primarily preoccupied with my own angers, frustrations, and desires, I am likely to conceive of God as a divine dispenser of rewards and punishments.

Some folks, in their egotism and anxiety, view God as they feel viewed by God. For example, they might say, *'Because my church rejected me, God, too must have rejected me... Or perhaps God rejects those people I reject and rewards those I would reward. This punishing god turns us against each other and even ourselves. This god suggests that the world is filled with things for me to use but not care for. It is full of "enemies" – I forget that they are, like me, part of the single fabric of creation.* These are all too human patterns of thought and NOT of the Divine Goodness who says to us, 'You are my Beloved, you are loved beyond measure!'

For me, spending time walking about, looking about is what keeps me grounded in God's love and care for me. Seeing the 'hazel nut', holding this treasure in my hand, and knowing God made this, God loves this, and God keeps this is a phrase for me to remember as... God made me, God loves me, and God keeps me. In this way I go forth secure of who I am, whose I am, and that I am to share the comfort and joy I find in this way of life. Say with me friends, God made you, God love you, and God keeps you.

May it be so. So be it. Amen.

Ivy Sun-basking



Holly Bear sun-basking



Zachary & Ivy



Pastor Pat's Nut



God Made This God Loves This God Keeps This

God Made Me God Loves Me God Keeps Me

God Made You God Loves You God Keeps You